

Trade Ep. B. V. 10.
OBSERVATIONS

ON THE
AGRICULTURAL
AND
POLITICAL TENDENCY
OF THE
COMMERCIAL TREATY.

Nolo Leges Angliæ mutari—
Latet Anguis in Herbâ.

L O N D O N :
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OBSERVATIONS, &c.

WHEN first the commercial treaty became a topic of general discussion, I confess I despaired of ever attaining the information deemed requisite to a right judgment of its merits.—Told that the opinions of merchants and manufacturers were to furnish that information, I found myself involved in all those difficulties, perplexities, and doubts, which the contrariety of opinions excited by opposite interests, but maintained by authorities equally respectable, and equally confident, must necessarily create. Thus circumstanced, I determined to search for the true grounds of decision upon a measure apparently so

complicated in its nature, yet so important in its consequences, before I suffered my judgment to be biaſſed by the looſe reports, idle conjectures, or intereſted opinions of others.

Impreſſed with this determination, the ſubject preſented itſelf to my mind in a threefold point of view. Its commercial, its agricultural, and its political tendency, ſeverally challenged the moſt deliberate and ſerious inveſtigation. But unacquainted with the minutiae of commerce, however converſant with the principles which ought to regulate it, and unwilling to ſubmit to the fatigue of enquiry, and the riſque of miſrepresentation, which might eventually be unneceſſary; I directed my attention to the two latter conſiderations before I ventured upon the former. As I may be challenged to juſtify this mode of proceeding, I ſhall beg leave to premiſe, what I truſt is

least likely to be controverted, that if the treaty with France breaks in upon any approved principle of national policy, that however great may be its commercial advantages, it ought not to be adopted. That it has such tendency is all that its opponents have to demonstrate, whilst those who defend it, must, to entitle it to the public support, shew that it is conducive to the interests of commerce, without probable injury to our agriculture, and without violating any important principle of policy.

Thus it appears, that they who oppose the treaty upon principles of policy, are relieved from the most intricate part of the enquiry into its merits; whilst those who defend it, are bound to make out the above complicated proposition in the full extent of its several branches.

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When we are told that the objects of this treaty is to do away national prejudice, and to settle a mutual intercourse between the two countries upon principles of the most extensive liberality, and that these objects are to be attained through the medium of commerce; minds not accustomed to look beyond the assertion, or which suffer their judgments to be directed by their feelings, may be tempted to approve the means for the sake of an end, so devoutly to be wished, as that which proposes to induce the blessings of peace and honourable security. But minds in the habits of reflexion may be carried beyond the professed object—they may trace back the history of former ages, or extend their views into futurity: what some term national prejudice, they may pronounce to be generous resentment; and to the charge of illiberal suspicion, give the milder term of prudent patriot precaution.—They may
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declare themselves unwilling suddenly and for light reasons to abandon the policy of their ancestors, or, in pursuit of temporary commercial advantages, to hazard that national superiority which has hitherto protected their commerce and preserved their liberties.

They may call for evidence to destroy the conclusions which the sad experience of the last ten years may have "engraved on the tablets of their hearts." They may describe France heading a confederacy, more formidable in its power, and more decisive in its views, than ever yet threatened the interests of Britain. They may, with the evils of that confederacy, "storied in characters of public shame and private ruin," demand something more than bare profession to assure them of the sincerity of a change so contradictory to former experience,

ence, so incompatible with former policy. —Patriotism must pause in deciding upon so questionable an appearance, and the warmest advocate for peace, require more than ordinary evidence to prove the measure conducive to its attainment—Whilst scepticism may deny, that the most aspiring ambition can so suddenly give way to philanthropic moderation; discernment may detect the object to be the same however disguised, and however varied the means of its completion.

But not to continue observations which some readers may deem neither necessary to argument, nor suited to the ends of investigation, I shall venture to affirm that the commercial treaty with France is not only incompatible with the long-established principles of national policy, but also irreconcilable with the true commercial and agricultural interests of Great-Britain.

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This is my proposition—If I can maintain even the first part of it, that it is incompatible with the long-established principles of national policy, I think myself intitled to claim from the advocates for the treaty, what they have not yet thought proper to state to the public, the grounds and evidence upon which they found their, and claim the publick, support.

The experience of all countries, in all ages, proves that the blessings of peace are most effectually secured by a constant readiness for war: or, in other words, that the country best prepared to repel an injury, or resent an insult, is least likely to experience either—From which I deduce this principle of policy---That every state ought to aim at a superiority of power, but most particularly at a superiority over those states, from whose principles of government, policy, or religion, they have most to apprehend injury,

jury, and whose situation affords the most favourable opportunity to perpetrate it. Perhaps there are no two countries in the world to which this principle is as applicable as it is to France and Great-Britain.

I disclaim the policy that feeds illiberal prejudice, or keeps alive ill-founded suspicions : I lament the necessity which revives the recollection of past injuries, but I appeal to it in my justification.

Let the most partial advocate for the treaty re-trace the history of the two countries ; let him, with the most partial disposition to France, determine upon the justice of their wars with Great-Britain ; let him reconcile with his notions of probity her constant insidious endeavours to excite civil wars in the state when she dared not openly to attack it : let him justify her aim at the destruction of our religious, civil, and political liberties :

ties : in a word, let him, from the history of centuries, extract one instance, from which he can conclude the views of France to have been at any time favourable to the interests of Britain. If he cannot, I affirm, what I trust the concurrent evidence of history will warrant, that from the earliest ages there has subsisted on the part of France towards this country and its liberties, a disposition neither to be subdued by force, nor conciliated by kindness.

Our ancestors have often bewailed it : we ourselves have felt it, and its evils are “ still bleeding in our hearts ; ” that the empire still exists we owe to the defeated projects of her boundless ambition, by a tenacious adherence to the sound maxims of our ancestors. If such be the adverse disposition of our neighbour, policy requires that we should at all times have a force at least equal to the defence of the em-

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pire and the protection of its trade: let us endeavour to ascertain the causes to which we are indebted for having hitherto commanded such force, as the best criterion to determine, whether the proposed treaty is likely to endanger it. I will venture to state two—the extent of our own commerce,—and the bounded commerce of France. By the extent of our own commerce, we have always had employed as many seamen as could with convenience be spared from our fields and manufactures. By the bounded commerce of France, she never has had employed in her foreign trade, I might safely say, one tenth part of the hands which might have been spared from her fields and manufactures*.

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* Mons. Melon, in his political essay on commerce, asserts, that even at present, if you divide France into 20 parts, 16 are labourers or peasants; two only artisans; one belonging to the law, church, and military; and one merchants, financiers, and bourgeois. Mr.

Hume,

In support of my assertion I might refer myself to the comparative state of population, which is three times as great in France as it is in England. I might refer myself to the foreign trade of the two countries, and to the comparative number of seamen employed in it, or to the comparative naval strength of the two countries, and the cause of our superiority during the last war. I might refer my reader to these enquiries,

Hume, in his essay on commerce, speaking of the difference of climate with a view to the question, what countries ought particularly to favour commerce, observes,—In such a fine mould or soil as that of those more southern regions, agriculture is an easy art; and one man, with a couple of sorry horses, will be able in a season, to cultivate as much land as will pay a pretty considerable rent to the proprietor. All the art which the farmer knows, is to leave his ground fallow for a year, as soon as it is exhausted; and the warmth of the sun alone and the temperature of the climate enrich it, and restore its fertility. In England the land is rich, but coarse; must be cultivated at a great expence, and produces slender crops, when not carefully managed, and by a method which gives not the full profit but in a course of several years.

did I not wish to avoid every reference which might distract or divert his attention from facts and objects less liable to controversy ; one of which is, that the treaty proposed comes particularly recommended to adoption by its unquestionable tendency to extend the foreign trade of both countries. For that purpose, English ports are to be open to French ships, and French ports to English ships. This is a striking feature of the principle of reciprocity upon which this treaty is said to be founded. Let us, bringing it nearer to our view, examine its proportions with attention: every person who has read the commercial treaty of 1713 will immediately recollect that feature ; every man conversant with the history of those times, and of the events which gave rise to that treaty, and acquainted with the grounds upon which it was rejected by Great-Britain, will naturally expect to find in the history of later times, and in the circumstances

cumstances of the present, some essential difference in the relative situations of the two countries, which renders that which in the year 1713 was reprobated as injurious to our commerce and incompatible with sound national policy, at this time conducive and reconcileable to the interests and views of both. For it were to insult the public understanding to endeavour to justify the treaty by merely contending, that the spirit and patriot zeal which rejected it in 1713, was blinded by ignorance, or misled by vulgar prejudice. Its advocates are bound in decency to attempt something more. They are bound by facts and reasoning to prove such a measure to have been at that time politic, or to shew that the altered circumstances of the present render it so. At the commencement of the reign of Charles the Second, when there existed few or no restrictions on our commerce with France, the balance of trade was so greatly against us,

us, that it was the subject of continual remonstrance. The Sovereign at length felt, and, though unwillingly, yielded to the views of his subjects. The trade of France was by various acts of Parliament subjected to so many restrictions, that they amounted almost to a total prohibition of it. Very different was our conduct towards Spain—By the treaty of 1667, she was let into all those immunities and privileges proposed by this treaty to be extended to France. What was the object of this distinction? France aimed at maritime power by the extension of her trade: Spain was rich and indifferent to trade: to counteract the views of the one, and to profit by the indifference of the other, was probably the ground upon which this preference was founded—I say probably, because I have not been able to meet with any authorities that might lead me to an exact conclusion upon this point. The immediate trade, however, between
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this country and Spain was never considerable, she having always and still receiving the greater part of our manufactures through the medium of Portugal, who has been the more benefited by it, from finding in our ports a constant market for her wines. The consumption of Portugal wines before the treaty, which gave her a preference in our markets, was very inconsiderable*. Should any circumstance deprive her of that preference, we may reasonably conclude the consumption will be considerably less, at least, such is the present expectation of France.

* “ No nation beside the English, take of the Portuguese wines, nor can be supposed ever to do it, since those who want this commodity are supplied much better from France, and from other parts, and at more moderate prices; and should England reduce the duties on the French wines to an equality with those on the Portuguese, this branch of trade, which is so advantageous, would be entirely lost to them. The same thing a little more or less is evident with respect to other fruits, since the English take off above ten times the quantity which all other nations together do,” *Lex Mercatoria*, p. 624.

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If Portugal don't find in our markets as large a demand for her wines, it is fair to infer, her voyages will be less frequent or more expensive, and that she and Spain must either pay an advanced price for British manufactures, or must receive them through the medium of some other state.

When we consider the political connection that subsists between France and Spain, the causes which led to that connection, and the events which have grown out of it, it is surely fair to presume, that if the latter can receive through the medium of France, British manufactures upon the same terms she now receives them from Portugal, that France will have a preference in the Spanish market. Thus France will find in our ports, not only a market for her own produce, but also in our manufactures the means of increasing her trade with Spain: whilst Portugal will
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be less encouraged to come into our ports, from finding the preference she formerly commanded, and her demands for British manufactures transferred to France ; a loss which may induce and justify her, as she threatened in the year 1713, to renew the prohibition of the woollen manufactures and products of Great Britain, which will complete the total loss of all the advantages we now derive from our trade with Portugal. This is a consideration which will surely justify the friends of our commercial and political interests to hesitate in hastily giving the treaty their support. It were no relief to our fears to be told, that the consumption of our manufactures will be increased, though the fact were established. The apprehension is, that that increase will be effected by the extension of the foreign trade of France. By her perhaps laudable endeavours in the cause of liberty, the British empire is dismembered

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of thirteen colonies. America cannot, however, suddenly reconcile herself to new and inferior manufactures. She still prefers the British manufacture: a preference which France cannot supply, but at an increase of expence to America.—Here the policy of France begins to open upon us, and may be reduced to this:—Whereas America, by my assistance, is no longer a part of the British empire, but her preference to British manufactures still continues; and whereas I cannot at this time supply her upon equal terms with Great Britain herself; be it agreed between the two states of France and Great Britain, that henceforth France shall be at liberty to export British manufactures upon the same terms with Britain herself. Here I may be told, that America will never submit to receive, through the medium of France, what she may immediately receive in her own bottoms from England.

—There may be a time, I admit, when probably she will not:—to me that period does not appear to be arrived.—If I am mistaken in this or any other conjecture, I shall thankfully receive correction; I shall congratulate myself that my apprehensions are visionary, and rejoice that the advantages of this treaty are real and substantial. Let me, however, be clearly understood. I apprehend that from this treaty, France, aided by the most favourable circumstances, will derive particular encouragement to become the carriers of British manufactures. That her foreign trade will be thereby extended, and as a nursery for seamen, that it will enable her to command a larger naval force, whenever she may, for national reasons, be disposed to direct it against our trade or liberties.*

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* “ The defence of Great-Britain depends very much upon the number of its sailors and shipping. The act of navigation, therefore, very properly endeavours to give

Those who consider the probable encrease of demands for our manufactures, all that is to be looked to, take a very bounded view of a very interesting political question. Our manufactures are one source of wealth, and wealth is one, but not the only, source of power. The manufactures of Holland furnish not the cause of her wealth, nor does her wealth, so much as the mode of acquiring it, furnish the cause of her power. She is the carrier of Europe*. Her sailors enrich her in peace,

give the sailors and shipping of Great-Britain the monopoly of the trade of their own country, in some cases by absolute prohibitions, and in others, by heavy burdens upon the shipping of foreign countries." *Smith's Wealth of Nations*, 192.

* Sir Josiah Child, in his discourse on trade, observes, that "this kingdom being an island, the defence of which has always been our shipping and seamen, it seems to me absolutely necessary that profit and power ought jointly to be considered." *Lord Sheffield's Observations on Commerce and Navigation*, p. 264.

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peace, and render her formidable in war. A nation of manufacturers may be more rich, but less powerful. Sorry should I be were the policy of the present times to degenerate us into such a description. But I own I suspect that such a consequence will follow the treaty now proposed, if it has the tendency which its advocates assert.

The trade which this country now

“When the act of navigation was made, the Dutch were, what they still are, the great carriers of Europe; and by this regulation they were entirely excluded from being the carriers to Great Britain, or from importing to us the goods of any other European country.”

A noble Lord, however, whose researches have thrown so strong and welcome a light on the principles and detail of commerce, observes, that “the Navigation Act prevented the Dutch being the carriers of our trade.”—Lord Sheffield’s *Commerce and Navigation*, p. 150. With great deference to so respectable an authority, I beg leave to submit that whatever was the immediate effect of the act, it has long since ceased to operate in the manner stated by the noble Lord.

our

drives with Holland is very considerably in our favour. It gives us wealth; but if, instead of Holland carrying our manufactures into foreign ports, we carried them ourselves, they would not only increase our wealth, but also encrease our power. But though we gain by our trade with Holland, she gains also—We make manufactures; she makes sailors, whilst she sells them. A less enlightened and politic state than France might see the advantages derivable from such an intercourse. — And what prevents her now adopting it I may be asked? A very serious difficulty; that her manufactures are now subjected to such high duties, that her ships must come almost empty into our ports, were she to propose becoming the carriers of British manufactures*.

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* If foreigners, either by prohibitions or high duties, are hindered from coming to sell, they cannot always afford

Let me suppose, what the commercial interest are taught sanguinely to expect, that the demand for our manufactures will be increased beyond measure—Let me then ask whether more hands must not necessarily be employed in them, and whence this demand for more hands is to be supplied? There must necessarily in every country be a point beyond which the mercantile or manufactural (if I may use the term) system in sound policy ought not to be extended—Whether we have already attained that point, or whether the expected increase of commerce is likely to carry us beyond it, are questions

afford to come to buy; because, coming without a cargo, they must lose the freight from their own country to Great Britain. By diminishing the number of sellers, therefore, we necessarily diminish that of buyers, and are thus likely not only to buy foreign goods dearer, but to sell our own cheaper, than if there was a more perfect freedom of trade. As defence, however, is of much more importance than opulence, the act of navigation is perhaps the wisest of all the commercial regulations of England. Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. p. 195.

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difficult, but absolutely necessary to be answered before we engage too far.—The landed proprietor will do well to consider whether the villages are at this time as populous as the interests of agriculture require; and whether additional temptations may not seduce the husbandman from the field to the manufactory; whether he might not sacrifice his natural prejudice to his own employment to the prospect of higher wages and greater gains, and bring up to the loom the sons he intended for the plough?

The extension of cities may please the eye, but the depopulation of villages must sink deeply into the heart. The interests of agriculture, which are the most productive, even in point of wealth, are intitled to the first consideration of every Government*.

* I here beg to refer my reader to Dr. Smith's Investigation of the Mercantile and Agricultural Systems. Wealth of Nations, 2d and 3d vol.

Some

Some writers have not scrupled to contend, that they ought to supersede every other—France has tried both extremes, and, if I mistake not, has in this treaty manifested her discovery of the medium by which they may be reconciled. If more hands will be necessary, I repeat, whence are they to be had? Our streets may swarm with idleness, but from idleness the manufacturer has nothing to expect: I again therefore intreat the attention of the landed proprietor—his fields must be abandoned—I appeal to the experience of the last war, when the necessities of the state drained the country towns of its most useful hands—I appeal to the experience of those who live in the neighbourhood of manufactories—they already feel the inconvenience; thousands are bred to the loom who had otherwise been husbandmen; but new temptations offer, hands are wanted, wages are raised as an in-

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ducement—the consequences no man can mistake*.

Here let me direct the public attention to another source of apprehension.—Is

* The great object of the Navigation Act is naval strength, it therefore sacrifices commercial speculations to strengthen our marine ; and, in answer to those who would risk our naval power in attempts to enlarge our commerce, surely it would be sufficient to say, we have, without hazard, an opportunity of more trade than our capital can possibly support ; and that it is well worthy consideration, whether we have not engaged by far too great a proportion of our capital in foreign trade, to the great detriment of other important national concerns, and particularly of the most important of all, namely, *agriculture*, which at this moment languishes in a great degree by the scarcity of money ; it would be found, on investigation, that not one half the money is employed in it that should be ; and that in many parts the farms are by no means properly stocked or cultivated. It is also well known, that the price of land has fallen nearly one third within eight or nine years. Putting out of the question the clamours of interested persons, the Navigation Act can have no enemies but those who, supposing it merely commercial, do not observe its object is naval strength. Appendix to Lord Sheffield's Observations on Commerce and Navigation, p. 297,

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there no danger that as the increase of demand for the manufacture must raise the price of the raw material, wool for instance, as the rise of the value of the wool must raise the value of pasture land; is there no danger, let me ask, of the farmer converting his arable into pasture, which promises him a most considerable profit? From such an event the most serious evils must follow, but we have no evidence to satisfy our apprehension that it cannot happen*.

* To prevent the charge of visionary apprehension, I request my reader's attention to the following passage from Bishop Burnet's Abridgement, of the History of the Reformation. "The greatest number of the priors of lands (says the Bishop) finding more profit in selling their wool than their corn, inclosed their estates: the commoners, ready to perish with hunger, rose up in arms; they insisted on a division of the lands: the young King even wrote on this subject, and proclamations were made against those who inclosed their lands." Upon such a text I leave my intelligent reader to make his own comment.

But suppose what constitutes the completion of all the short-sighted views of Avarice—suppose our ports crouded with foreign fleets of merchantmen—the perfection of our manufactures securing them a market, and giving an interest in the carriage of them.—They are shipped, and the profits to us are immense—where is your employment for the, I had nearly said most useful members of your empire, where are your sailors? Ships you don't want, your neighbours answer the purpose of your commerce full as well—they, as Holland does now, take off your manufactures, and you want no more*.—Your former nursery for seamen is unnecessary, but in its becoming so, the nation loses its

*. “England has never attempted to avail herself of half the carrying trade she might have had—the keeping ships for freight, not being the most profitable branch of trade, it is necessary, for the sake of our marine, to force or encourage it, by exclusive advantages.” Appendix to Lord Sheffield's Observations on Commerce and Navigation, p. 296.

pride and future strength, the strength that is to protect its trade and liberties. Your ploughmen, your sailors, are by necessity or inclination dwindled into manufacturers. The policy of France prevails, the principle of the navigation act is done away, and the greatness of Britain is no more. Like the hero of antiquity, from the noblest heights of ambition, we now see her stooping to and busied with the distaff, and may hereafter hear her, like the same hero, raving with the agonies of the poisoned present; sorry should I be to pursue the parallel in the fate of its bearer; for though I cannot subscribe to the merits of the treaty, I most readily subscribe to the purity of the Minister's intention in bringing it forwards. The undertaking was most arduous, and though he fail in his efforts to atchieve it, *Magnis tamen excidit ausis*—

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Here I shall pause, requesting my reader to contemplate at his leisure the several objects which I have presumed to submit to his attention. Had other avocations allowed, I had entered more particularly into them, even at the hazard of being charged with prolixity; and, indeed, should these few pages pass the ordeal of candid criticism, I should feel it my duty on some future day to finish what I have here but lightly sketched out, unless superior abilities should condescend to relieve me from the necessity.

F I N I S.

